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ABSTRACT

A remedial reading program can be justified if it is well managed. Such a program is characterized by effective planning, organization, staffing, direction, control, innovation, representation, and communication. The key to a well-managed remedial reading program is a responsible principal. The principal should organize a committee to handle planning of the program; such planning should result in clearly stated program objectives. An organization should be carefully created to carry out the objectives, including selection of the right teacher. The teacher is then given direction as determined by the objectives, the principal, and the committee. In order to control the program, the teacher should have informal, standardized, and criterion-referenced test results to determine the effectiveness of the program. As innovative materials, methods, and equipment become available, the program should use them whenever possible. Effective representation and communication with parents and other school personnel should exist to gain total support for the program. A bibliography is included. (VJ)

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"Remedial Programs in the Schools -
Can They be Justified?"

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It would be rather foolish for someone to claim that a particular technique or set of materials or even a combination of techniques and materials will guarantee that every child in a school system or even in one school will be able to read to the best of his ability at the end of a period of time such as grades six, eight, or twelve. Children may have difficulty in learning to read because of family attitudes towards success in school, frequent moving, poor inner-family relationships, emotional problems, and other factors beyond the effective influence of the school (1) (3) (9) (16) (19) (24) (25) (30). Also, few schools can claim that their reading program is doing the best possible job in the reading areas that they do control. Lack of thorough readiness programs, too difficult

initial reading experiences, unavailable materials in classrooms for poor readers, lack of sympathetic and sensitive attitudes of teachers, and poor management techniques all contribute to reading failure in school (2) (8) (11) (13) (18) (20) (23). Even if none of these educational causes of reading problems happens in a particular school, in our highly mobile society, children who do have reading problems enroll after attending other schools where such problems do exist. Thus, it would seem that all schools will continue to have some children who need special help in reading.

The question of whether or not remedial programs are needed is different than the question raised by the title of this paper. Remedial programs are needed, but do existing remedial reading programs justify the time, effort, and money being spent to help children with reading problems? Before pursuing this question, it would be well to define what remedial reading is and is not. For purposes of this discussion, the following will not be considered remedial reading: extended readiness classes; extended time in non-graded elementary classrooms, for example, four years to complete the traditional first three grades; corrective reading done in the regular classroom by the teacher; and clinical work done away from the school in a college or centralized public school reading clinic on a one-to-one basis. The following will be considered remedial reading: small groups of children taught by a reading teacher outside the regular classroom; ability grouped children, for example, twenty eighth grade children with reading problems working with similar basic reading materials; and individuals or small groups tutored by adult volunteers, paid teacher aides, college students, or children from the school.

Granted the need for these kinds of remedial reading situations, one must still ask whether the program is worth the money and effort. The

answer depends upon management. A well managed remedial reading program can be justified, and a poorly managed one cannot be justified (15) (22) (29).

A well managed reading program involves planning, organization, staffing, direction, control, innovation, representation, and communication (13) (15).

Planning involves the setting of objectives and the steps for achieving the objectives. Organization is putting together the people, time, facilities, materials, and other resources into a program to accomplish the objectives. Staffing includes the selection and utilization of personnel. Direction involves keeping the program moving by the best route to accomplish the objectives. Control is needed to check on progress and to determine success or failure of the program. Innovation includes introduction of new methods, materials, and equipment. Representation is the public relations work needed in both the school and the community. Communication is the sharing of information with all persons involved in the program.

Where the reading program is poorly managed, the program will probably not be successful and therefore not justifiable. Failure of even one management function might sabotage the entire remedial program. The following is a description of an unsuccessful remedial reading program where none of the management functions were successful.

Title 1 money was made available to a school district for a remedial reading program. The building principal did not work with members of his faculty to determine the objectives of the program. Instead, a "warm body" (certificated teacher) was hired and delegated the authority to set up the program by himself. The new reading teacher devised a schedule that took children from gym class and industrial arts. His workday was organized so that he could stand extra duty in the halls and on the playground since his small class size allowed him more time than was available to other teachers.

The remedial reading teacher had heard many people say that the same methods and materials used in good regular classrooms would be the right thing to do in remedial reading, and he followed this advice. The upper grade children in his classes did not respond as well as younger children to his instruction, so the upper grade children were eventually removed and younger children taken in larger numbers to prevent them from becoming poor readers. No evaluation involving criterion-referenced tests was done, but children were tested annually with norm-referenced tests. No written reports were given to the principal. The rationalization was that "the teacher's time could be used for instruction rather than wasted on reports that no one would read." Thus the manager was uninformed.

Every new material available on the market was requested by the teacher, and the room was full of boxes and equipment in excellent condition. The teacher found it helpful to use such materials as the SRA kits with the entire group as this allowed time for putting up bulletin boards and doing other school related chores. No volunteers were used to help the children with reading problems.

Many parents did not understand the remedial reading program and were unhappy to have their children in the classes. Some teachers at the school could not sleep nights for worrying about the small class size of the remedial reading teacher. The remedial reading program was a one-man program with duties delegated to the remedial reading teacher by the principal. No other member of the staff was involved directly in the remedial reading program.

This description of an unsuccessful remedial reading program follows the order of the eight management functions previously listed, and it is evident that these functions were not properly carried out in this case. A

teacher was given the job of teaching children to read better, but the lack of planning and poor organization caused the program to be a waste of money and time. Without planning, objectives, control, and direction, the teacher's interests became more and more esoteric. Possibly more harm was done than good since the staff resented the program and parents were not informed of the benefits that their children might receive. Perhaps, the fact that some programs are not managed well is the reason that articles are written in professional journals with titles such as "Let's Get Rid of Remedial Teaching" (5).

In any school the person responsible for the reading program is the principal. Other members of the middle management team, such as general supervisors or reading consultants, also have responsibilities toward building good reading programs, but the building principal is the one responsible and accountable person who can and must manage the reading program in his school. Thus, the key to good management and, therefore, the key to good remedial reading programs is the principal of the school.

With the principal as the key manager, a remedial reading program might be organized in this way:

Planning. Remedial reading does not exist by itself. It is part of a total school reading program. Therefore, the entire school's reading program will need to be evaluated before the remedial reading program can be planned. The principal might use a reading committee (13) to help him plan the reading program. They could study standardized test results, guidance studies such as success in high school or college, and other reports of pupil progress. The materials, facilities, and equipment could be inventoried, and resources such as summer reading classes, clinics, and other programs not directly controlled by the school could be noted. After evaluating the present

reading program, the needs of children, and resources available, the planning can be done.

If it has been determined that some children are in need of remedial reading, then detailed planning can begin. The objectives of the remedial reading program should be listed in writing so that all personnel involved in the program can work towards this goal. The reading committee should be of help to the principal in writing these objectives and will be better able to participate in the program after having had the opportunity to help write the objectives. Of course, the objectives of the program might change, but the remedial reading teacher hired to achieve these objectives should not be allowed to change them without approval of the principal and the reading committee, since the remedial reading objectives must relate to the needs of the total school reading program.

Organization. Once the objectives have been decided, an organization needs to be created to carry out the objectives. Ability grouping may serve the needs of some children. Availability of paid or volunteer aides needs to be considered. Also, the size of the remedial reading staff will help determine what can be accomplished in remedial reading classes. Some time may be available as a result of team teaching or other scheduling of teacher time. Other help may come from assigning a person to the school to teach remedial reading on a full or part time basis.

The organization of the program should not be so rigid that the remedial reading teacher will have no freedom of operation. Yet, the remedial reading teacher can hardly be expected to do such tasks as plan and organize a tutoring program where upper grade children help lower grade children without the help and guidance of the principal and reading committee. It would be better to spell out tasks such as selection of pupils; diagnosis and

evaluation procedures; scheduling; expected daily, weekly, and annual lesson planning; and reporting (14) (17) (21) (28) rather than to leave this up to the remedial reading teacher. Generally curriculum help of this type -- along with descriptions of facilities, materials, and equipment needed -- is furnished in state (6) or local (10) (26) curriculum guides, but specific problems of each school will need special consideration.

Staffing. The selection of the right person to be the remedial reading teacher is one of the most important management tasks of the principal. Without good personnel, the program will not achieve its objectives. Therefore, a teacher who is enthusiastic, patient, optimistic, sensitive, positive, organized, dedicated, confident, intelligent, and knowledgeable needs to be selected for the job.

The very special person needed to teach remedial reading is not always available even in these days of greater teacher supply. Some principals develop classroom teachers into remedial reading teachers by encouraging them to take classes in how to teach reading, to attend workshops, to belong to the IRA, and to take part in other professional inservice activities. Whatever the source of supply, the teacher should understand the objectives of the program from the beginning. Also, if he needs further college training to become a reading specialist, it should be mutually understood that this will happen along with participation in inservice activities.

Direction. In the planning stage of the remedial reading program, the objectives and steps needed to reach the objectives were listed. Direction by the principal, reading committee, and supervisors is needed to help the remedial reading teacher keep moving toward accomplishing the objectives of the program. The point to be made here is that the objectives, not the interests or whims of the teacher, determine the direction of the program.

For example, the unsuccessful program previously described illustrated how the interests of the teacher in helping younger children rather than older children can be rationalized into a prevention oriented program to avoid working with older children who seem to be less responsive to his instruction. Written objectives, detailed planning, and frequent contacts with the principal and others will help keep the program moving in the desired direction.

Control. The remedial reading teacher will need both informal and standardized tests to diagnose children's reading problems so that he can keep his children moving ahead with proper instruction (4) (14) (21). He will, also, need criterion-referenced tests to determine what a child has learned over a short period of time (27). The principal will need systematic test results such as pre- and post-standardized tests results as well as access to other test results to determine if the objectives are being achieved. This information can be obtained by the use of formal reports as well as through frequent personal contact with the remedial reading teacher.

Innovation. New materials, methods, and equipment are always available to the remedial reading teacher, and they are needed to keep the teacher and children enthusiastic about the program. A variety of methods can be used to teach a skill; for example, a workbook, tape recorder, chalkboard, feltboard, or filmstrip projector. Special emphasis can be given to a project such as writing a story or even a book.

The use of innovative programs such as upper grade children helping primary grade children or innovative equipment such as the use of film loop machines should be in harmony with the objectives of the program. If they are not, the instruction, however innovative, may be a waste of time. Innovation should occur to help children learn to read, not to entertain the teacher.

Representation. There may be very negative feelings about remedial reading in some communities. The word "remedial" indicates that something is wrong, and in the minds of some people this may be the class for children who are not very bright. The objectives of the school's program will determine who is to participate in the class. If it can be determined that all the children selected for remedial reading do, in fact, have the ability to read on higher levels, then a description of the remedial reading program and its opportunities for children can be given in a very positive way to the public. Also, tutoring projects where upper grade children give service to the school to help younger children can be given very wide publicity. Care must be used, however, to see that no child in remedial reading is embarrassed by the publicity.

The staff of a school needs to be told about the program just as much as the general public. Those teachers not directly involved in the program may not understand the purpose of the remedial reading classes and could actually undermine the program with uninformed opinions passed on to other teachers and to parents. The good things happening in the remedial reading program should be explained to teachers and parents as often as needed.

Communication. The counselor, nurse, reading teachers, some subject area teachers, and the remedial reading teacher are all interested and involved in the remedial reading program. The objectives of the program and the duties of each person will need to be communicated to those who will have a part in implementing them. If the school reading committee helped set the objectives of the program, and if they presented them to the entire faculty, then all members of the school team will understand and support the remedial reading program.

The very heart of the remedial reading program is a teacher working closely with children to help them become better readers. The exciting work

of helping children enlarge their vocabulary, learn how to attack words, and to comprehend stories, read aloud and enjoy together books of high interest, and all the other rewarding things done each day in the classroom have not been covered in this paper. This fun part of remedial reading is the "tranquil blossom on the tortured stem," the tortured stem being all the management needed to bring about the good teaching situation.

Can remedial reading programs be justified? Yes, if they are well managed as outlined in this paper. Sophisticated accountability measurements will no doubt soon be available to determine whether or not a particular remedial reading program is justified. Certainly, children are going to continue to need special help in reading. Whether or not they get this help may depend on how well existing programs measure up. Well managed programs are justified; poorly managed programs can not be justified.

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